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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY MAY 17, 2012
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**CHICAGO AREA SURGEON CONVICTED AT FEDERAL TRIAL OF MAKING
FALSE STATEMENTS RELATING TO HEALTH CARE BENEFITS AND SERVICES**

CHICAGO — **Dr. John Natale**, a Chicago area vascular and thoracic surgeon, was convicted of two federal felony counts for making false statements in reports relating to health care benefits and services following a week-long trial in U.S. District Court. A jury deliberated several hours yesterday afternoon before convicting Natale of two counts of making false statements and acquitting him of two counts of health care fraud and one count of mail fraud for allegedly defrauding Medicare, federal law enforcement officials announced today.

Natale, 63, of South Barrington, remains free on his own recognizance while awaiting sentencing, which U.S. District Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer scheduled for Aug. 15. He faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of the two counts.

Natale specializes in repairing abdominal aortic aneurysms, which is a weakening of the artery, and the trial focused on six surgeries he performed in 2003 and 2004 on patients at Northwest Community Hospital in Arlington Heights. Natale currently operates at Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago, according to his own testimony at trial.

Northwest Community Hospital medical officials, who also testified at trial, assisted with the government's investigation.

Natale was indicted last September for allegedly defrauding Medicare by submitting false claims for payment and by intentionally preparing fictitious medical reports that detailed medical procedures that he knew did not occur or were more complex than those he actually performed.

The evidence at trial showed, and the jury found, that for at least two patients in 2004, Natale prepared false post-operative reports that, among other things, contained extensive details about aneurysm repairs that he never performed, and falsely described the surgeries he did perform as being more complex and elaborate than they actually were. In the case of one patient whose medical condition deteriorated a year after Natale operated, another surgeon testified that he had to untangle the falsehoods in Natale's records, which, if relied upon, would have had a serious impact on his subsequent treatment of that patient.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Amarjeet Bhachu and Christopher Niewoehner.

The conviction was announced by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, together with Lamont Pugh III, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Region of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, and Thomas P. Brady, Inspector-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

The investigation was conducted by the Medicare Fraud Strike Force, which expanded to Chicago in 2011, and is part of the Health Care Fraud Prevention & Enforcement Action Team (HEAT), a joint initiative between the Justice Department and HHS to focus their efforts to prevent and deter fraud and enforce anti-fraud laws around the country.

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